UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/ICEF/1996/P/L.11/Add.1
2 July 1996
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/FRENCH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
Third regular session 1996
16-19 September 1996
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

FOR ACTION

COUNTRY PROGRAMME RECOMMENDATION**

Gabon

Addendum

SUMMARY

The present addendum to the country note submitted to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 1996 contains the final country programme recommendation for Board approval.

It contains a recommendation for funding the country programme of Gabon, which has an annual planning level of $1,000,000 or less. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve the amount of $3,750,000 from general resources, subject to the availability of funds, and $3,750,000 in supplementary funds, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions, for the period 1997 to 2001.

* E/ICEF/1996/18.

** The original country note provided only indicative figures for estimated programme cooperation. The figures provided in the present addendum are final and take into account unspent balances of programme cooperation at the end of 1995. They will be contained in the "Summary of 1996 recommendations for general resources and supplementary funding programmes" (E/ICEF/1996/P/L.43/Add.2).

96-16565 (E) 010896 020896 050896

/...

Basic data (1994 unless otherwise stated)

Child population (millions, 0-15 years)	0.5
U5MR (per 1,000 live births)	151
IMR (per 1,000 live births)	91
Underweight (% moderate and severe)	..
MMR (per 100,000 live births) (1990)	500
Literacy (% male/female) (1995)	74/53
Primary school enrolment (% net male/female)	../..
Primary school children reaching grade 5 (%, 1987)	50
Access to safe water (%, 1988)	68
Access to health services (%, 1983)	90
GNP per capita	US$ 3,550
One-year-olds fully immunized against:	
tuberculosis:	68 per cent
diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus:	48 per cent
measles:	50 per cent
poliomyelitis:	48 per cent
Pregnant women immunized against:	
tetanus:	13 per cent

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Gabon is continuing to democratize its political institutions, pursuant to the Paris Accords of 1994 with the aim of guaranteeing political stability. With a population of just over 1 million, the country owes its prosperity to its abundant natural resources (petroleum, minerals, timber). However, the country's rating on the human development index is 36 points lower than its rating in terms of per capita gross domestic product (GDP), which amounts to US$ 3,913. In addition, there are significant socio-economic inequalities and disparities in the distribution of national income.

2. The country's economic development strategies and the considerable amount of government expenditure, made possible by petroleum revenues, have created imbalances in the market economy and have accelerated the process of external indebtedness. In 1994, the external debt represented 97.5 per cent of GDP and debt service was equal to 25 per cent of export revenues. Moreover, Gabon's economy suffers from structural imbalances attributable to its reliance on raw materials and to the absence of any stable production base outside the petroleum and mining sectors. There is very little agricultural activity and rural areas are underpopulated as a result of a large outflow of population, which represents a true development challenge; nearly three fourths of the population is concentrated in urban areas, and 67 per cent of that group lives in the two main cities, Libreville and Port Gentil. About 20 per cent of the population consists of foreigners, most of whom come from other African countries.

3. Despite the implementation of various structural adjustment programmes since 1986, the economic crisis has only widened the discrepancy between the country's potential and the actual living conditions of children and women. While there has been some improvement, the rates of infant mortality, under-five mortality and maternal mortality are still too high. In particular, the high incidence of diarrhoeal diseases and malaria, and the steady decline in breast-feeding, the increase in malnutrition among children under four years of age and the spread of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) reflect the poor quality of curative, preventive and promotional care. Given the high budgetary allocations in the health sector (US$ 100 per capita per year) and the large number of existing health facilities, these indicators reveal the health-care system's lack of effectiveness and efficiency, the main causes of which can be traced to the Government's policies and strategies.

4. This record is not very encouraging, and reflects the poor performance of preventive activities. In 1993, the rate of vaccination coverage was 52 per cent. The use of oral rehydration therapy (ORT) remains very low (10 per cent). Access to safe drinking water is about 68 per cent nationwide (40 per cent in rural areas), but the unit costs are very high in comparison with countries in Central and West Africa. While 72 per cent of the inhabitants of urban areas have human waste disposal systems, such systems are virtually non-existent in the country's hinterland. Moreover, urban areas face serious sanitation problems.

5. Despite a gross school enrolment ratio of 121 per cent (with no significant differences between the sexes), the continued poor quality of educational performance is reflected by a 33 per cent repetition rate and an estimated 32 per cent drop-out rate. This situation is even more serious among girls; the net school enrolment ratio, at 95 per cent for boys and 74 per cent for girls, shows a disturbing disparity between the sexes. According to government statistics, 55 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men are illiterate. Even though it invests a relatively large amount of resources in education, Gabon has the least cost-effective educational system of all the African countries, according to a 1994 study. The major difficulties facing the educational system are attributable to the emphasis on quantitative expansion at the expense of quality, poorly qualified and unmotivated teachers, and a shortage of teaching materials and textbooks. There is also a lack of innovative policies capable of meeting the challenges of improving quality and getting out-of-school children back into the classroom.

6. The high rates of maternal mortality and illiteracy, and the fact that the net school enrolment ratio for girls is 21 per cent lower than the ratio for boys, show that much remains to be done to improve the situation of Gabonese women and girls. One particularly serious problem is the high number of clandestine abortions (803 in 1993), which occur most frequently in the 15 to 19 age group. In Libreville, one third of all households are headed by women, 45 per cent of whom are single. Despite the existence of legal provisions that protect their status, women continue to suffer discrimination, especially with respect to dowries, divorce and inheritance. Moreover, traditional customs and beliefs, which are still strong in rural areas, convey a negative image of women, thereby hindering their advancement.

7. Over the past two years, the Government has begun to review and impart a new direction to its social policies and programmes. The goal is to use resources more effectively and efficiently. The increasing inadequacies of the social security and welfare systems make it imperative to seek alternatives, particularly the decentralized management of outlying facilities, the rationalization of their operations and community participation. A number of funding sources and cooperation agencies are involved in promoting this reform process.

PROGRAMME COOPERATION, 1993-1996

8. The cooperation programme for the period 1993-1996 was geared to achieving medium-term objectives in the areas of vaccination, promotion of ORT and breast-feeding. The results of these efforts are unsatisfactory and reflect the structural deficiencies of the health-care system, the lack of political attention to primary health care (PHC), the limited capacity and poor motivation of national authorities and the lack of coordination among the various programmes. None the less, some of the objectives have been met: two hospitals in Libreville have been designated "Baby-Friendly Hospitals" and a ministerial order prohibits the distribution of breast milk substitutes in maternity clinics and hospitals in Libreville. The multiple-indicators survey currently under way will make it possible to measure the progress of vaccination coverage between 1993 and 1995 and the exclusive breast-feeding rate.

9. The presence of UNICEF has strengthened advocacy and cooperation with national authorities; this led to the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994 and to the Government's decision to contribute financially to the cooperation programme. The main lessons drawn from past cooperation are as follows: (a) positive and lasting results in improving the living conditions of children and women and in the implementation of the Convention cannot be achieved unless coherent, effective social policies are designed and pursued; (b) the lack of reliable, up-to-date data is an obstacle to social planning and to the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the actions taken and the objectives sought; (c) the low rate of implementation of activities implies that cooperation should be geared to technical support and the strengthening of national capacities; and (d) the existence of private-sector concern about social problems represents an opportunity to mobilize financial resources locally.

RECOMMENDED PROGRAMME COOPERATION, 1997-2001

Estimated annual expenditure

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Total
General resources						
Support for reform of the social sectors	750	750	750	750	750	3 750
Supplementary funding						
Support for reform of the social sectors	750	750	750	750	750	3 750
Total	1 500	1 500	1 500	1 500	1 500	7 500

10. National authorities and other development partners participated actively in the programming process. The Executive Board approved a one-year short-term programme for 1996 to harmonize the programming cycles of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Moreover, all the relevant agencies of the United Nations system will participate in the preparation of the strategy note for Gabon for 1996.

Programme objectives and strategies

11. The cooperation programme is intended to help improve the living conditions of children and women to bring them to a level that is more consistent with the country's per capita GDP, by promoting and supporting the implementation of reforms in the social sectors. Since the target groups of UNICEF activities represent over half of Gabon's population, they should be given priority among the Government's social concerns. At the same time, their absolute number is limited in terms of the total population (for example, there are only 36,000 children under the age of 1 year). Thus, Gabon, with its economic resources, can easily ensure a better life for all of its children and women, and can honour the commitments it has made at the national and international levels, particularly with respect to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The absence of targeted, coordinated, cost-effective social policies and programmes is the root cause of the country's difficulties in meeting the basic needs of its population.

12. This is why UNICEF and the Government plan to use this programme to support a change of course in the country's social policies, especially in the areas of health care, nutrition and basic education.

13. The overall strategies on which the programme is based are complementary and interrelated, and include: (a) reducing the socio-economic disparities and

inequalities affecting children and women; (b) adapting the supply of services to the population's basic needs; (c) improving the effectiveness and efficiency of social services, particularly in health care and basic education; (d) using demonstration projects to provide guidance as to the new social policies to be adopted. The actions implemented will show how cost-effectiveness can have a multiplier effect at the national level and ensure continuity; and (e) offering technical assistance to strengthen national capacities, particularly through the use of the experience and expertise of countries whose level of social and economic development approximates that of Gabon.

Support for reform of the social sectors

14. UNICEF will develop a single programme in support of reform of the social sectors, consisting of three projects: social planning; advocacy and mobilization; and strengthening of basic services. The first two projects will be nationwide in scope. The project for the strengthening of basic services will be sited in three departments, to be chosen jointly with the Government on the basis of the following criteria: socio-economic indicators; population density; the presence of other donors; the existence of non-governmental organizations; and the level of community participation.

15. The operational strategies will need to work in a synergetic manner to achieve the objectives of each project. These strategies are: (a) advocacy and mobilization, to give priority attention to children and women and to support the revision and reorientation of social policies; (b) national capacity-building, to respond to the problems of inadequate statistical, social planning, monitoring and evaluation skills in the institutional and operational plans of national officials and non-governmental organizations; and (c) empowerment of communities, which will apply in particular to the project for the strengthening of basic services, to ensure the involvement and active participation of the beneficiaries, and of women in particular, in micro-planning, management, financing, monitoring and evaluation of activities.

16. The aim of the social planning project is to strengthen national capacities by setting up a system for the collection, analysis and dissemination of statistical data. The lack of this essential basis for social planning and for carrying out reforms is a major constraint in almost all the social sectors. In coordination with the other external participants, technical and training support will be given to the national staff in the Ministry of Planning and to the sectoral social ministries. In respect of the reorientation of policies and the introduction of planning tools and methodologies, the technical experience and expertise of UNICEF at the international level will be put at the Government's disposal. Before concrete support activities are undertaken, a preparatory phase of study and research is planned with a view to identifying needs in respect of training and supervision for national partners in the areas covered by the project. A feasibility study on restructuring the State budget will be carried out, and an annual bulletin of social statistics will be published in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme. This project will ensure that the situation of women and children is kept constantly under review, and also that the impact of social programmes, the UNICEF programme and the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be monitored and evaluated.

17. The objective of the advocacy and mobilization project is to make the Gabonese authorities and their partners aware of the necessity of respecting commitments made at the national and international level in favour of children and women, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF will work with Gabonese civil society and with non-governmental organizations, trade unions and associations in particular. The project aims: (a) to mobilize resources in the private sector (major donors, industrial and commercial enterprises) so as to implement at least one third of the activities of the present programme; and (b) to promote knowledge and know-how among families, and women in particular, of practices which will help to improve their well-being and eliminate harmful behaviours.

18. In addition to socio-cultural studies and research, a communication plan will be elaborated. Information on the situation of children and women, as well as the positive results obtained by the demonstration activities under the project for the strengthening of basic services will be disseminated and meetings with Gabonese employers will be organized. Among the project's objectives will be the training of communicators to improve media coverage of the problem of women and children.

19. The project for the strengthening of basic services will be implemented in two rural departments and will be concerned with health and basic education. After two years of activities and a mid-term evaluation, the experiment will start in an urban fringe department. The departments will be chosen with the Government on the basis of the criteria outlined above.

20. The general objective with regard to health is to reinforce primary health care at the level of health centres and clinics in the areas covered by the activities, with a view to ensuring a minimum package of promotional, preventive and curative care. The project's main strategy concerns the empowerment of communities and their active participation in the management of basic health services. Specific quantitative and qualitative objectives will be identified after the preparatory phase. The principal activities will entail carrying out preliminary studies and surveys and the collection of information, the mobilization of national personnel, the training and supervision of health workers and members of the community, the institution of systems to monitor and supervise activities, the establishment of cost-recovery and financial management mechanisms in each health establishment, and the provision of supplies and equipment.

21. In view of the high drop-out rate among girls, the project will seek to reach girls who have left school by setting up non-formal education centres. These will offer a minimum package of practical education, together with vocational training geared to local economic activities. Those girls who wish to re-enter the formal, general or technical vocational educational system will be guaranteed the chance of doing so. Before any activities begin, the institutional framework for the establishment and functioning of the centres will need to be defined and preliminary studies and surveys will need to be carried out. These preparatory activities will make it possible to determine the capacity and definitive mission of each centre, prescribe the curriculum and educational methods, and set quantitative and qualitative objectives.

22. The integrated monitoring and evaluation plan which has been devised for the entire programme of cooperation constitutes the frame of reference for the strengthening of internal capacities and those of the national partners. Output and impact indicators will be utilized. Indicators that are unavailable will be obtained through the studies and surveys planned in connection with each project. Moreover, one of the programme activities relates to the improvement of the collection, analysis, use and dissemination of data and the setting up of an information system within the Ministry of Planning and the sectoral ministries.

23. The three projects are closely linked and mutually reinforcing. The social planning project will supply information on developments in the situation of women and children and on social indicators for use by the advocacy and mobilization project. The positive results of the demonstration activities will also be used to raise the awareness of decision-makers and demonstrate the merits of reforms in the social sectors. National capacity-building in data collection and analysis and in social planning will support the establishment of activities in the departments (project for the strengthening of basic services). Advocacy and mobilization of key actors constitutes the essential support for promoting an overhaul of social policies, for establishing new directions in primary health care and basic education, and for mobilizing supplementary funding.

Programme management

24. The Ministry for Planning and National Development will have responsibility for coordinating the whole programme and also for preparing the annual reviews and the mid-term review in 1999. The sectoral ministries will be commissioned, each within its sphere of competence, with the implementation of the project activities and with preparation of the annual plans of action. At the provincial and departmental levels, the decentralized structures of each ministry will be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of activities, as provided for in the individual project documents. In view of the low level of community involvement in the development process in Gabon, the programme will be aimed at empowering communities in order to ensure their participation in the micro-planning, implementation and management of activities.

25. UNICEF will adopt several approaches to support the Government in the execution of the programme: the use of non-governmental organizations at the field level; the identification of coordinators (focal points) in the ministries who will benefit from all the training and informational activities of UNICEF within their spheres of competence; the use of high-level technical consultants; exchanges of experience with countries having problems similar to those in Gabon.

Fund-raising

26. The negotiations under way for the signing of the basic agreement raise the possibility of a significant increase in the financial contribution of the Government to the programme of cooperation. In 1995, the amount provided was

$100,000. A fund-raising strategy targeted to the private sector will be developed in the context of the advocacy and mobilization project.

Partnership

27. The preparation of the present project has made it possible to strengthen coordination with the other bilateral and multilateral agencies as well as with the national and international non-governmental organizations. It has also made it possible to identify the areas in which cooperation will be improved, including: statistical information (UNDP and the French cooperation agency); follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development (UNDP); social policies and budget allocations (UNDP, World Bank, United Nations Fund for Population Activities, World Health Organization (WHO)); primary health care (WHO, French and Belgian cooperation agencies, European Union, African Development Bank (ADB)); education for girls (ADB, French and Canadian cooperation agencies, Peace Corps (United States of America); follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development; follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, and of information, education and communication activities (UNFPA, UNDP).

TABLE

LINKAGE OF PROGRAMME BUDGET AND STAFFING/STAFF COSTS

COUNTRY : GABON
PROGRAMME : 1997-2001

PROGRAMME SECTION/AREAS AND FUNDING SOURCE	PROGRAMME BUDGET (In thousands of US dollars)				POSTS a/										STAFF COSTS b/ (In thousands of US dollars)		
	GR	FSF	NSF	TOTAL	D2/L7	D1/L6	P/L5	P/L4	P/L3	P/L2	IP	NP	GS	TOTAL	IP	LOCAL	TOTAL
GENERAL RESOURCES :																	
SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL SECTOR REFORM	3,750			3,750	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	5	702.4	716.7	1,419.1
TOTAL GR	3,750			3,750	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	5	702.4	716.7	1,419.1
SUPPLEMENTARY FUNDING :																	
SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL SECTOR REFORM		0	3,750	3,750	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	60.7	60.7
TOTAL SF		0	3,750	3,750	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	60.7	60.7
TOTAL GR & SF	3,750	0	3,750	7,500	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	5	702.4	777.4	1,479.8
ADM. & PROGRAMME SUPPORT BUDGET	Operating costs			0.0													
	Staffing				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
GRAND TOTAL (GR+SF+ADM)					0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	5	702.4	777.4	1,479.8
Number of posts and staff costs:																	
Current programme cycle											1	1	3	5			
At the end of proposed programme cycle (indicative only)											1	1	3	5	702.4	777.4	1,479.8

GR = general resources.
SF = supplementary funding.
FSF = funded supplementary funding.
NSF = new supplementary funding.
IP = international Professional.
NP = national Professional.
GS = General Service.
ADM = administrative.

a/ Each post, regardless of its funding source, supports the country programme as a whole.
b/ Exclude temporary assistance and overtime; include costs of United Nations volunteers.